

## ON A LITTLE-KNOWN SEA-SNAKE FROM THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

By G. A. BOULENGER, F.R.S.

With Plate V.

DURING his stay at Lifu, Loyalty Islands, Dr Arthur Willey was so fortunate as to secure two examples of a very rare marine Snake, which he has presented to the British Museum, where the species to which they belong was unrepresented. Although three descriptions of it have appeared, under as many different names, our knowledge of this Snake is a very meagre one, and it is therefore with great pleasure I accepted Dr Willey's proposal of drawing up an account, accompanied by figures, of the specimens obtained by him.

### AIPYSURUS ANNULATUS.

*Emydocephalus annulatus*, Krefft, Proc. Zool. Soc. Lond., 1869, p. 322, and Snakes of Austral. p. 92 (1869).

*Emydocephalus tuberculatus*, Krefft, ll. cc. pp. 322, 93.

*Aipysurus chelonicephalus*, Bavay, Mém. Soc. Linn. Normand. xv. no. 5, 1869, p. 34.

*Aipysurus annulatus*, Boulenger, Cat. Snakes, III. p. 304 (1896).

Eye as long as its distance from the mouth. Snout short, rounded, twice as long as the eye; rostral as deep as broad, bearing a conical, spine-like tubercle suggesting the egg-wart or rostral callosity of some reptilian and batrachian embryos<sup>1</sup>; nasals longer than the præfrontals; frontal hexagonal, longer than broad, as broad as the supraocular, as long as its distance from the rostral; parietals as long as the frontal, sometimes divided by a longitudinal suture; supraocular undivided; nasal forming a suture with the single præocular; two postoculars; temporals 2+2; two upper and two lower labials, the second extremely large, formed by the fusion of several shields; first upper labial in contact with or narrowly separated from the præocular; two or three pairs of chin-shields, the anterior extra pair, if present, small, detached from the first pair of lower labials. The upper head-shields may be rough with small granules. Scales in 17 rows, feebly imbricate, nearly as long as broad, rough with several small tubercles. Ventrals 139—141; subcaudals 31. The coloration is different in the two specimens, both males:—

A. (Total length, 760 millim.; tail, 110.) Annulate black and yellow, the black annuli broader than the yellow ones and often running together on the middle of the back, and with some black spots between them on the belly; head yellow with a wide-meshed black network.

<sup>1</sup> Which is, however, absent in the sea-snakes as well as in all known Ophidians.

B. (Total length 690 millim.; tail 105.) Blackish brown, speckled with yellow on the sides and beneath, here and there with small yellow spots showing, in their arrangement, traces of the annuli described in the preceding specimen; head yellow, spotted and speckled with black.

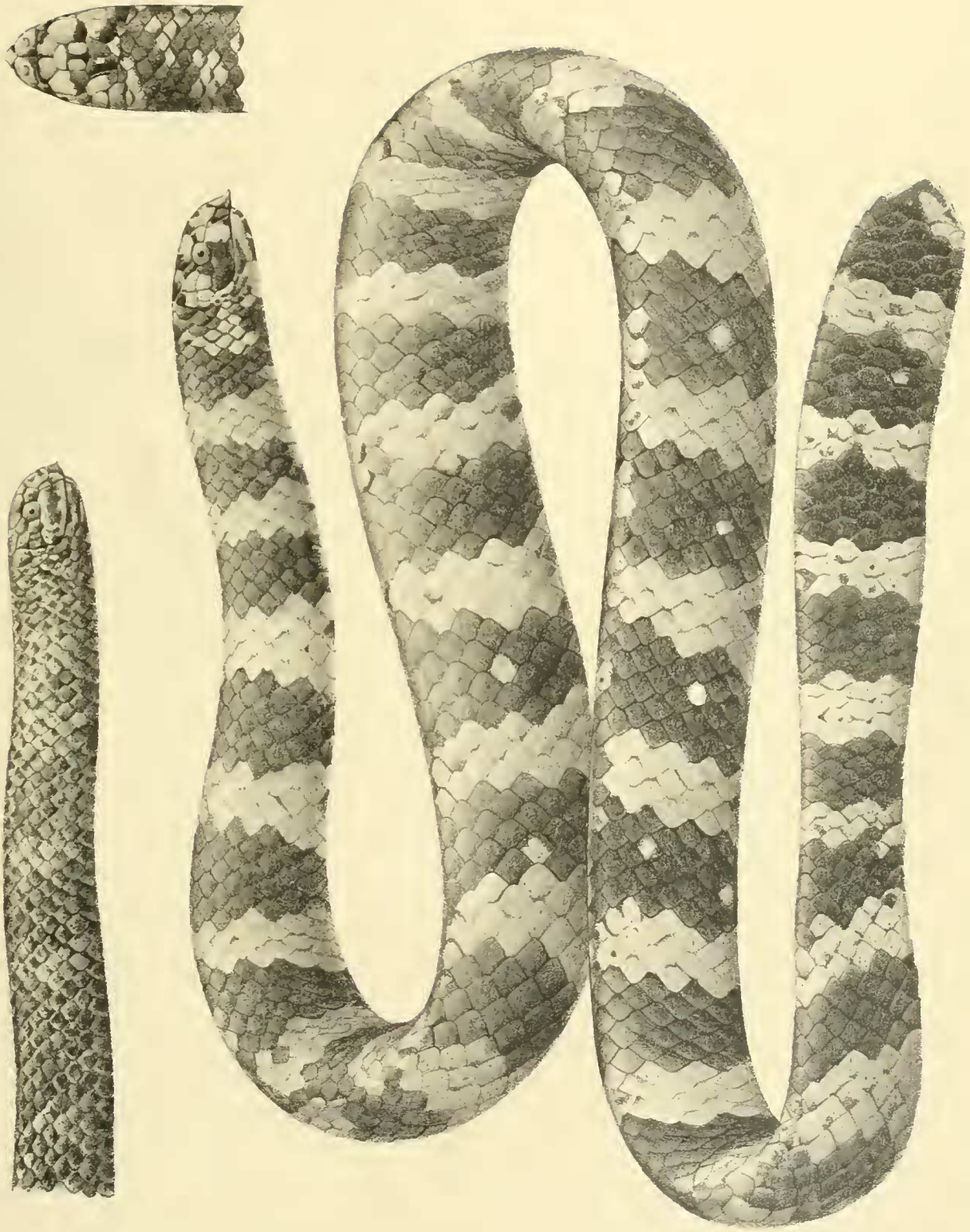
This species appears to have been described, almost simultaneously, by Krefft and by Bavay. The specimens obtained at Lifu by Dr Willey are unquestionably referable to Bavay's species, established on examples from the same locality and agreeing in the conical shape of the rostral shield. As to the Snakes, of unknown origin, described by Krefft, Mr E. R. Waite, of the Sydney Museum, has been so kind as to supplement, at my request, the insufficient account of them given by that author. Mr Waite agrees with me that *Emydocephalus annulatus* and *E. tuberculatus* are "undoubtedly the same," and he adds the following notes on their head-shields: "Rostral a little deeper than broad, with a groove on each side running from the mouth to the nasal<sup>1</sup>. Frontal slightly longer than broad, not so long as its distance from the snout. Nasal broadly in contact with the single præocular. Three pairs of chin-shields, first smallest, the last separated by a shield."

These notes, together with a sketch of the head, upper and side views, taken from one of the types (that of *E. tuberculatus*), show a remarkable agreement with Dr Willey's specimens, except for the absence of the conical tubercle on the rostral shield. However, the fact that the degree of development of this tubercle varies in the Lifu specimens according to Bavay ("plus ou moins prononcée selon les individus") renders it doubtful whether this character by itself can be regarded as indicating specific difference, and I think it advisable to consider, provisionally at least, the specimens with and those without the tubercle as pertaining to a single species. This view is further substantiated by the remarkable agreement in the number of ventral and subcaudal shields, viz. 135—144 + 30—36 in Krefft's two specimens, and 144 + 36 in Bavay's type; whilst our two specimens show 139—141 + 31. As regards coloration, our specimens represent *A. annulatus*, Krefft (A) and *A. tuberculatus*, Krefft (B), whilst *A. chelonicephalus*, Bavay, appears to be exactly intermediate between the two.

<sup>1</sup> A trace of this groove is observable in our specimen B.

#### EXPLANATION OF PLATE V.

*Aipysurus annulatus*. Natural size, with upper view of head; and side view of head and anterior part of body of smaller specimen (B).



J Green ad nat litt

BOULENGER. AIPYSURUS ANNULATUS

West, Newman imp